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AUSTRALIA

**STATEMENT BY JULIE HECKSCHER ACTING PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY-SEVENTH
SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

Australia remains committed to upholding a strong international rules-based order, in which disarmament and non-proliferation plays a critical role. We will all be better off in a world where the rules are clear, mutually negotiated and consistently followed. In that context, the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”) is a big success story. It is the world’s most successful international disarmament treaty, responsible for eliminating an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. Australia is a strong supporter of the OPCW and the central role it plays in supporting global disarmament and non-proliferation. It is critical that all States Parties support it in its work, including its Programme and Budget for 2023 and the Annual Report. Blocking progress through technical objections and tactics of disruption is not in the interests of all States Parties and runs contrary to the intention and spirit of collaboration that led to the establishment of the Convention.

Australia continues to look for practical ways to support the OPCW. In October this year, the Government of Australia hosted a productive and successful visit by Director-General Fernando Arias and a small team from the OPCW to Australia. Australia is highly appreciative of the time the Director-General gave to promote the important work of the OPCW, not just in Australia, but in our region as well.

In particular, we thank Director-General Arias for his participation at the subregional forum on Chemical Weapons Convention national implementation in Brisbane, which Australia co-hosted with Malaysia and the OPCW. This forum brought together attendees from Australia, the Pacific, Timor Leste and South East Asia.

The forum focused on national implementing legislation, chemical safety and security and the importance of cooperation within the Pacific to support the Convention outcomes. Our support for the forum is consistent with Australia’s longstanding interests in promoting strong and effective national implementation of the Convention, especially in our region, and ongoing efforts to build counter-proliferation capabilities within our region. We are confident that this forum will help participants to further strengthen the implementation of the Convention.

The forum was the result of the ongoing strong partnership between the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office and the Malaysian National Authority for the Convention. The OPCW Mentorship/Partnership Programme included a visit by a Malaysian delegation to Australia in March 2022 and a reciprocal visit by an Australian delegation to Malaysia in



August. We especially thank H.E. Ambassador Zainol Rahim Zainuddin, Head of the Malaysian National Authority, for his leadership and vision.

We appreciate the public lecture Director-General Arias delivered at the Australian National University which emphasised the importance of the OPCW and raised awareness of the Convention challenges among the next generation of scientists, diplomats and academics.

We welcomed the Director-General's participation in a ceremony in Canberra to formalise a technical agreement with Australia's Defence Science and Technology Group, one of the OPCW designated laboratories, for preparing test samples for the Eighth Official OPCW Biomedical Proficiency Test. Australia is proud of the integrity and expertise of our defence scientists, and the considerable amount of work undertaken to reach and maintain the OPCW designated laboratory status.

Science and technology cooperation with the OPCW and other States Parties is a priority for Australia. We are contributing to critical OPCW activities such as the network of OPCW designated laboratories and the ChemTech Centre, which will be an essential vehicle for the Organisation to address its current and future challenges. We look forward to the opening of the ChemTech Centre next year. Strengthening the OPCW's verification toolkit through enhanced analytical capabilities and inspector preparation is just one benefit.

Australia was pleased to provide an additional contribution to the ChemTech Centre earlier this year. Significant support from many States Parties will allow the Centre to become a catalyst for international cooperation. It will enhance the Technical Secretariat's capability to assist and provide critical support and training. Australia looks forward to engaging with the OPCW and other States Parties in capacity building.

Mr Chairperson, we join the international community's condemnation at the use of chemical weapons. Progress under the Convention at eliminating these abhorrent weapons has been significant. Our success should not be taken for granted. Recent chemical weapons use poses a clear threat to global security. Non-compliance with the Convention cannot be tolerated.

Australia applauds the work of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). The reports released to date are the result of thorough research and analysis with clear findings and evidence to support them. We note the publication this year of further OPCW Fact-Finding Mission reports and anticipate additional IIT reports. This highlights the need to continue to strengthen the OPCW's investigative capabilities.

We condemn Syria's use of chemical weapons and welcomed the decision at the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties suspending certain rights and privileges to the Syrian Arab Republic, until it comes into compliance with the Convention. State Parties are right to demand that Syria immediately and fully comply with its obligations under the Convention. After nine years, it is unacceptable that Syria's initial declaration still cannot be considered accurate or complete.

Many questions continue to surround the poisoning of Alexei Navalny with a novichok nerve agent in August 2020. Those questions need to be answered. Last year Australia joined with others in submitting questions to the Russian Federation under Article IX (2) of the Convention. Australia calls on Russia to engage in good faith and to respond directly to the questions submitted to it under Article IX. It is in the interests of all States Parties that all incidents of chemical weapons use are thoroughly investigated. This is a core tenet of the Convention.

Australia condemns Russia's unilateral, illegal and immoral aggression against the people of Ukraine. The invasion is a gross violation of international law, including the United Nations Charter. Australia strongly supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We call on Russia to immediately withdraw its forces from Ukrainian territory. Australia has worked with our partners to support Ukraine and hold Russia accountable for its actions.

We remain concerned about the risk of possible chemical weapons use in Ukraine. We extend our appreciation to the Technical Secretariat and States Parties for responding to Ukraine's requests for assistance and protection. This year, we contributed AUD 200,000 to the OPCW Trust Fund for the Implementation of Article X (assistance and protection against chemical weapons) of the Convention for the provision of assistance and protection to Ukraine in the event of the use or threat of use of chemical weapons. We call on States Parties to support Ukraine including through voluntary contributions to the Trust Fund.

Australia looks forward to the Fifth Review Conference next year. It is an occasion for all States Parties to review our accomplishments under the Convention since the Fourth Review Conference. It is a timely and important opportunity to shape activities for the next five years. We anticipate productive debate and are eager to work with all to reach consensus on a path forward. We all have an earnest responsibility to do this and make further steps toward the complete eradication of chemical weapons – for our generation and for future generations. We applaud the work of the Open-Ended Working Group for the Preparation of the Fifth Review Conference and pledge our further cooperation.

Australia supports the Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2023. We urge all States Parties to support the budget and pay their contributions in full and on time to ensure the OPCW is able to properly plan and deliver on its mandate.

A strong and appropriately structured OPCW will put the Organisation on the best footing to meet the challenges of the future. I would like to commend the Technical Secretariat for taking practical steps to promote gender and geographic balance within the Organisation, while recognising the importance of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity.

One final note, it is my honour to take on the role as Australia's representative to the OPCW following the tenure of H.E. Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus. Ambassador Neuhaus made a significant contribution to the work of the OPCW over his four years in The Hague. Ambassador Neuhaus has retired from the diplomatic service after a long and distinguished career, and we wish him well in his new endeavours.

I ask that this statement be designated an official document of the Twenty-Seventh Session of the Conference of the States Parties and posted on the external server and the public website.

Thank you Chair.